www.historymarg.com

DOI: 10.52131/pjhss.2024.v12i1.2106

Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 12, Number 01, 2024, Pages 605–611
Journal Homepage:
https://journals.internationalrasd.org/index.php/pjhss

Nehru Report and a Shift into Muslims Politics in India: The Evolution of Muslim Nationalism

Zulqarnain Haider [1]

[1] PhD Scholar, Pakistan Study Centre, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: zulqarnain9038@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received: December 12, 2023
Revised: March 19, 2024
Accepted: March 20, 2024
Available Online: March 22, 2024

Keywords:
Nehru Report
India
Muslims
Politics
Nationalism

Funding:
This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

Muslims of the sub-continent had been living together for centuries. However, the arrival of the British totally changed the political landscape of the united India. Due to unfavorable and drastic policies of Britain disrupted the political and cultural strata of the Indians. The outbreak of war of independence in 1857 revealed some strict segments from the side of British. Different constitutional measures were taken to run the administrative set up of the India. The Nehru Report of 1928 marked a significant milestone in India's constitutional history, proposing self-governance within the British Empire. However, its centralized structure and lack of safeguards for minority rights drew criticism, particularly from the Muslim leadership. The study examined the Nehru Report its salient features and what were the response of the Muslims of India and which strategies were adopted to shift the trends of Muslims politics in India at time when report burst a cloud of criticism from the Muslims. Qualitative method of study has been adopted to carry out this research to its final edge. Primary and secondary sources have been used in this research paper.

***© 2024 The Authors, Published by iRASD. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the* Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License**

Corresponding Author's Email: zulqarnain9038@gmail.com

1. Introduction

History tells that the Muslims in the Indian Sub-Continent had been victim of the clutches of slavery first at the hands of the British and then the Hindus since the episode of the War of Independence of 1857. The credit goes to Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan who guided the Muslims properly and asked them to observe the loyalty of the British, dedicate themselves for modern education and to keep themselves away from politics (Khan & Shamshad, 2022). It was the result of Sayyed's efforts that the Muslims got political awareness and in earlier part of the twentieth century they began to demand their rights in a well-organized manner. The Partition of Bengal (1905), Simla Deputation (1906), Formation of the Muslim League in 1906, Minto-Morley Reforms (1909), Annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, Lucknow Pact (1916) and some other major events and incidents witness the inculcation of the sense of Muslim nationalism among the learned class by Sir Sayyed (Khan & Shamshad, 2022).

There was lived two major communities in the Indian Sub-Continent i.e. the Hindus and the Muslims, who were trying hard to obtain respective rights. For that purpose, constitutional reforms were introduced on the political landscape of united India. Different suggestions were given for constitutional process. The castle of unity which was built on the sand of uncertainty was washed away due to arrogant behaviour of Hindus. Jinnah's initial exhilaration in 1928 faded quickly as the year came to a conclusion. Hindu-Muslim unity would be swept away by waves of dissatisfaction and disillusionment since it was founded on changing sands of communal mistrust, secrecy, and uncertainty. The brief illusion that Jinnah felt was caused by Birkenhead's extreme hatred for all Indian politicians. His disagreements with his Congress colleagues appeared small because to his arrogant English mannerisms. Jinnah left Calcutta and went back to Bombay right once to plan a boycott of Simon and his commission's impending arrival. As Chagla his assistant, observed "must say Jinnah was as firm as a rock as far as the question of the boycott of the

Commission was concerned". He chaired the boycott committee and served as its secretary. "There were suggestions that the boycott be limited to politics rather than social issues. Jinnah did not move an inch and would have agreed. A boycott, according to him, was a boycott, and it had to be total and inclusive. In relation to the boycott campaign, we had numerous meetings. We gathered in large numbers at the Chow-patty Sands."

When Simon was arrived in India on February 3, 1928, Jinnah's boycott was completely successful. Gandhi sent a letter to "My heartfelt congratulations to the organizers for the very great success they achieved. ... It did my soul good to see Liberals, Independents and Congressmen to stand together on the same platform." On the night before, he left London, Birkenhead gave Simon a briefing; the following day, he wrote Viceroy Irwin to remind him that "We have always counted on the non-boycotting Muslims, on the downtrodden community, on the economic interests, and on man's others, to break down the attitude of boycott". Simon commission held an opinion that Indian community is illiterate and they did not have ability to frame any constitutional document. From that, Indian leaders took this challenge to frame their own constitutional document which appeared in the form Nehru report. For this purpose, all parties conference was called to chalk-out a constitutional document for India. Jinnah was present at the All-Parties Conference in Delhi on February 12, which was presided over by Congress President Ansari. There were Motilal and Jawaharlal, along with most of the other prominent political leaders of India, including Lajpat Rai, Malaviya, and Jayakar.

Gandhi showed little faith in constitutional planning by staying at his Sabarmati ashram and refusing to attend. But that was precisely the goal of the conference, which aimed to offer a single Indian substitute for any combination Simon and the others may devise. "The goal specified in the constitution was the first topic of discussion for the conference. It was suggested that India's constitution should strive to construct a system of administration known as a dominion form. Some members objected to this, arguing that since the Congress had resolved that independence should be the ultimate goal, no other goal should be pursued." The latter meeting was headed by Jawaharlal Nehru and former Congress President S. Srinivasa Lyengar (1874–1941), who stood in stark contrast to both Motilal and Jinnah in this regard.

The framework that was ultimately decided upon called for drafting a constitution "for the establishment of full responsible government." Resolving the issue of Muslim representation and rights proved to be more difficult. For more than a week, there was constant wrangling and bartering until "I had to flee to prevent riots and insurrection because the strain was too much for me!" Gandhi received reports from Jawaharlal (Wolpert, 1984). Jinnah made an effort to stay optimistic. Before the All-Parties Conference concluded, the budget session of Delhi's assembly had begun, and he persuaded some of his independent colleagues to endorse an appeal, he had crafted on communal unity. However, ten fruitless days after it started, the summit ended with no consensus on any issue of Muslims. Although Lajpat Rai, Jayakar, and Malaviya wanted to completely do away with separate electorates, they were not prepared to accept any of the compensating constitutional changes, that Jinnah demanded.

Jinnah had consistently maintained a vague stance on separate electorates. They were an unavoidable evil, the kind of protection Muslims needed as long as the community was too weak and illiterate to aim for anything resembling equality with Hindus. However, there were methods to provide Muslims enough genuine security and constitutional leverage to render these crutches of affirmative action unnecessary. Infact, Jinnah had made precisely these suggestions in 1927. (Wolpert, 1984). The Muslim League Council of resolution made it difficult for the representatives to make decisions without either having the All-Parties Conference accept all of their recommendations or without first consulting the League Council for guidance. Given the circumstances, the All-Parties Conference of March 8, 1928, was primarily marked by discussions on communal issues and a deep division between the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha-Sabha regarding the questions of seat reservation for majorities and separation of Sindh from the Bombay presidency (Hayat, 1998).

They were substantially accepted by Congress in May of 1927, after being approved in March by the League, which was still united at the time. The matter remained unchanged even after this conference was postponed until May 19, 1928. On the other hand, the communal organizations had become more dispersed and their perspectives had become more inflexible.

www.historymarg.com

Due to these limitations, the conference on May 19 resolved to form a committee to review and decide on the fundamentals of an Indian constitution by July 1st of the following year.

The members of the Committee were Madhorao Aney, M.R. Jayakar, N.M. Joshi, Shuaib Qureshi, Ali Imam, Tej Behadur Sapru, G.R. Pradhan, Motilal Nehru (as Chairman), and Sardar Mangal Singh. M.S. Aney and M.R. Jayakar represented the Hindu perspective, while the two Muslim gentlemen represented the Muslim viewpoint (Bahadur & Johari, 1988).

However, these ten individuals were not in agreement when it came to proposing the tenets of the constitution. M.R. Jayakar stated that, he was unable to take action on the Committee. While Sir Ali Imam was occasionally available to the Committee, he was only able to attend one sitting due to illness that prevented N.M. Joshi from attending any of the sessions. Pradhan participated in Committee meetings through June 12th. Due to the immense complexity of the assignment, the Committee was unable to submit its report by July 1st, as required by the May 19th, 1928 decision. This was completed on August 10, 1928. It is interesting to note that the primary driving force behind the Indian leaders' efforts to propose a positive constitution was their concern that they would be viewed as little more than policy critics and unable to produce anything meaningful in the way of a well-reasoned constitution. The initial reason for such attempts might have been the assassination of Swami Shrad-hanand (Bahadur & Johari, 1988).

Nehru report was the first attempt from the side of Indian community to frame a future constitution for India. However, the report could not satisfy the Muslims of India because it totally ignored the rights of this community (Bahadur & Johari, 1988).

2. Salient features of the Nehru Report

The first attempt by the Indians to draft their constitution was the Nehru Report. They may only try to change or influence constitutions that were imposed by the British before. The Madras Congress of 1927 constituted a committee led by Pandit Motilal Nehru to draft a constitution in response to Lord Birkenhead's challenge. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, his son, filed a resolution in the same session advocating for total independence rather than a dominion status. Gandhi thought this was an unreasonable and unworkable demand. Based on the approach the Nehru Committee followed, it appears that the younger Nehru was pressuring his father Motilal and mentor Gandhi into doing something. According to David Page:

"The author was determined to confront the problem and resolve it. He was against communal organization; he did not want to change the existing structure of the Indian society. He was opined of that in free India parties would be formed based on economy, all spank strongly by younger Nehru not his father." (Kazimi, 2009).

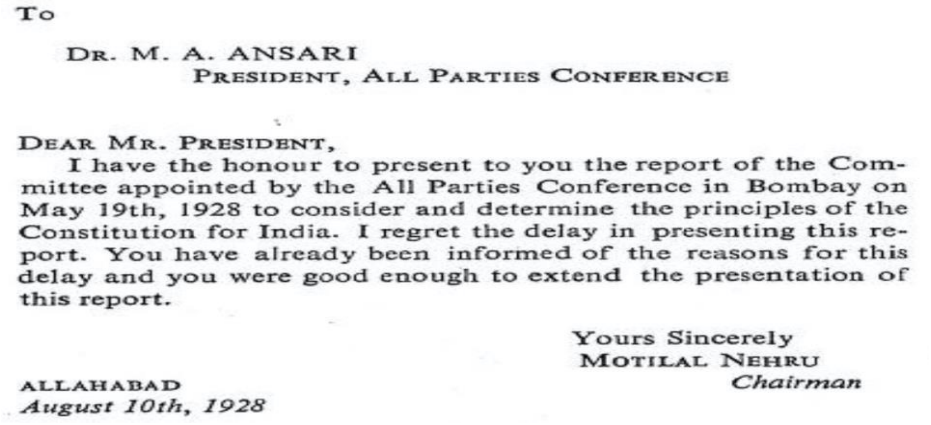
This midway change in policy reflects a change in personalities. Motilal was harassed by Hindu Maha-sabha propaganda, not Jawaharlal. He caused the committee to resolve from the Delhi Muslim Proposals not due so much to communal considerations as to a liberal outlook which considered communal safeguards out of date. At the time of submission of Nehru report, there was given an introductory chapter which points are in the below paragraph. The committee was tasked with framing a constitution for the establishment of full responsible government. They assert that their instructions imply following the model of self-governing dominions. The terms responsible government and dominion form of government" are treated as synonymous throughout the report (Kazimi, 2009).

The committee assumes that India's political parties generally agree on seeking full dominion status within the British Commonwealth of Nations. While some advocate for complete independence, the prevailing consensus was that India's status should match that of self-governing dominions like Canada and Australia. The attainment of dominion status was seen as the next immediate step, making it unnecessary for the committee to justify their recommendations under ordinary circumstances (*Indian Institute of Applied Political Research*, 1975).

Here is the original letter which Motilal Nehru wrote to president of All Parties Conference regarding the Nehru report:

www.historymarg.com

Figure 1



To

DR. M. A. ANSARI
PRESIDENT, ALL PARTIES CONFERENCE

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT,

I have the honour to present to you the report of the Committee appointed by the All Parties Conference in Bombay on May 19th, 1928 to consider and determine the principles of the Constitution for India. I regret the delay in presenting this report. You have already been informed of the reasons for this delay and you were good enough to extend the presentation of this report.

Yours Sincerely
MOTILAL NEHRU
Chairman

ALLAHABAD
August 10th, 1928

Figure 1 is taken from original text of Nehru report retrieved through online Internet Archives. The following were the recommendations advanced by the Nehru Report:

a) "Dominion Status should be given to India.
b) India would be comprised on Federal form of government with residuary powers vested in the center.
c) There should have a parliamentary form of government. It would be headed by a Prime Minister and six ministers who were appointed by the Governor General.
d) The legislature would be bi-cameral.
e) Separate electorates should be abolished.
f) The weighting system for minorities was just as flawed as having separate electorates.
g) In regions with a minimum ten percent Muslim population, Muslim seats could be reserved; however, this would need to be strictly proportionate to the size of the community.
h) Muslims ought to have a quarter of the Central Legislative Assembly represented.
i) Sindh should only be divided from Bombay if the Committee declared it to be financially independent.
j) Full provincial status should be granted to the N. W. F. P.
k) South India should create the new province of Karnatic, which speaks Kanarese.
l) India should declare Hindi to be its national language." (*Indian Institute of Applied Political Research*, 1975).

3. Muslim Response to Nehru Report and the Evolution of Muslim Nationalism

The Committee was plagued by numerous issues from the beginning. Due to view differences, the All Parties Conference in Delhi had ended in a standoff. Therefore, a compromise formula of a fully responsible government was proposed to find common ground between the opposing viewpoints. This concept of total Responsible Government was promoted by the Nehru Committee within the framework of India's Dominion Status. Moulana Hasrat Mohani fiercely criticized the idea, calling it a complete betrayal. The Moulana continued to oppose Pandit Motilal Nehru's vote of thanks for this report. Saying that this resolution was a distortion of reality. (*Indian Institute of Applied Political Research*, 1975).

"Pandit Nehru does not deserve our thanks at all, he attacked it, claiming that he had suggested Dominion Status as a substitute for India, which is betrayal. Our ultimate goal is total independence, and anything less than that is unacceptable" (Saeed & Mansur, 2000). Jinnah proposed three amendments in the Nehru but the presenter of the report completely turned down the demands of Jinnah. These demands were as follow:

a) 1/3 representation for Muslims in the Central Assembly.
b) For ten years, in the Muslims majority provinces i.e. Punjab and Bengal actual population ratio should be maintained.
c) There should be federal structure instead of unitary form of government residuary power should be vested to provinces (Kazimi, 2009).

www.historymarg.com

All of these proposed changes were ignored from the sides of Hindus. After this, new waves of politics were come into India. Jinnah gave his famous fourteen points which changed the political landscape of the India. For Hindu-Muslim cooperation, the Nehru Report turned out to be the proverbial fly in the ointment. The dispute over this report between Muslims and Hindus created a whole new arena for tensions, disputes, and objections. A climate of suspicion, mistrust, reciprocal disputes, and significant divisions emerged in the wake of allegations and counter-accusations, and this proved to be the roadblock to liberation. Due to their greater numbers, Hindus in the Indian subcontinent had a greater influence than Muslims in terms of population ratio. On the other hand, over the previous turbulent years in politics, Muslims had also been able to see through this poisonous mindset. They had real concerns about Hindu thinking, thus they now wanted specific protections. In actuality, the Nehru Report provided false numbers in order to unequivocally deny the desire for artificial nurture or safeguarding. It claimed that Muslims were so powerful that they could defend themselves and that they were the majority in Punjab, Sindh, the NWFP, and Baluchistan. Furthermore, the report stated that only ten percent of the population those communities needed specific protections (Saeed & Mansur, 2000).

The way in which elections were conducted determined the Indian Muslims political existence. In light of this and the unique political landscape of India, Muslim leaders had called for a separate Muslim electorate. They had held the opinion that an independent election system was the only way to protect Indian Muslims' political rights. The British Government finally gave in to this demand in the Minto-Morley Reforms, following much wrangling. Additionally, this arrangement was upheld in the 1919 Montford Reforms, whereas the Hindus had, for the first and only time, acknowledged this demand. However, they later broke their word and launched a formidable campaign against the separate electorate. In light of the Delhi Proposals, Quaid-i-Azam had agreed to renounce this demand; nevertheless, the Hindus turned down this offer. The separate electorate was deemed harmful to minorities by the Nehru Committee as well. I stated "since separate electorate gave a way to communal sentiments, thus, it should be eliminated and joint electorate should be introduced" (Saeed & Mansur, 2000).

Numerous sources attacked the Nehru Report. The country's Fundamental Rights, which ensured social and religious freedom for all segments of the populace, included protections for Muslims and other minorities. For instance, it stated: "Nobody shall be treated based on religion, caste and creed while he assumes any public or employment office or the exercise of any trade or calling." Once more: All citizens have an equal right of access to, and use of public roads, public wells and all other places of public resort. Admittedly, however, it rejected separate electorates because they make the majority wholly independent of the minority and its votes and usually hostile. In addition to recommending that Sindh be kept apart from the Bombay presidency, equal status for the N.W.F. Province and Baluchistan was also acknowledged. This was because it would not only be doing violence to the principle of self-determination, but would necessarily result in antagonizing that majority population. But given that separate electorates were abandoned and seats were reserved for majorities, as the Muslims had demanded for Punjab and Bengal, these concessions to their demands were deemed insignificant.

In the end, this was the limited support that various Indian Muslim groups provided to the national cause. The Report represented the pragmatic aspect of the Indian movement and was intended to be a fitting response to Lord Birkenhead's racial hubris. However, what transpired in the follow-up was a doubled-up national disgrace. Mahatma Gandhi said, "The communal solution has naturally lapsed, having lapsed along with the Nehru Constitution." The harsh reality of national life is that there should be no compromise when we take into account that it collapsed as a result of the persistent and coordinated actions of a volatile segment of the Muslim community, whose appetite grew with each attempt on the part of the supporters of Indian nationhood to appease it (Bahadur & Johari, 1988).

Perhaps showing more moderation, Gandhi officially congratulated Motilal Nehru on the accomplishment and sent him his best wishes. With much enthusiasm, Subhas Chandra Bose said that the Royal Commission had accomplished what it had set out to accomplish and that all that remained was for the Commission to go through with the Report and write a ditto at the conclusion. Motilal Nehru saw it as his own kid, took a personal interest in every remark, and was determined to have it accepted without question or change (Bahadur & Johari, 1988).

www.historymarg.com

Jinnah was in abroad at the time of report. He was shocked by what had happened when he reached India. Though his response was clear, he was cautious and unwilling to speak in terms of condemnation. He declined to recognize the conclusions of the Lucknow Conference and the Nehru Report as final. After a few days, Muhammad Ali returned to the nation. He was frustrated to see that the Nehru Committee had thrown the Delhi proposals in which, he had contributed into the trash and destroyed the foundation for a settlement. He criticized Motilal Nehru for renouncing the Madras Congress resolutions in addition to the Delhi proposals. Gandhi was accused by him of being inconsistent and of neglecting the Muslims (Hamid, 1971).

The period of Hindu- Muslim unity met its end with arrival of Nehru report. This report generated a wave of heat and reservation among the Muslims. Now, Muslims full realized that congress would never think on the side of Muslims. A heavy response came from the side of Muslims especially Quaid-i-Azam and from his other companions. Upon convening in Lucknow on August 28, 1928, the All-Parties Committee realized that all the prior agreements about protections for minorities had been completely abandoned. When M.C. Chagla, Jinnah's closest disciple, and his close friend the maharaja of Mahmudabad signed the Nehru Report, it dealt a blow to Jinnah (Hamid, 1971). In Calcutta, Abdul Kalam Azad made an ineffective attempt to get the Muslim League to adopt the Nehru Report by a majority vote. During a more extensive All-Parties Conference held on December 22, 1928, Jinnah was the main person who stopped the Muslim League from approving the Nehru Report. Although Jinnah was a careful lawyer, he was an idealist when it came to politics. Written promises, not ambiguous declarations of good will, were what he supported. Thus, an era of Hindu Muslim unity reached to its end (Kazimi, 2009).

The August 1928 publication of the Nehru Report gave Muslims the impression that the Congress was attempting to crush the spirit of Hindu-Muslim cooperation established in the Lucknow Pact. Jawahar Lal Nehru, according to the Quaid-i-Azam, was mostly to blame for it. India's Muslim community responded angrily to the Nehru Report's suggestions. They saw the Report as detrimental to their interests, which was why they were furious (Kazimi, 2009). Regarding the Report, Jinnah stated, "I disagree with this Report. It is detrimental to the interests of Muslims, in my opinion". The Aga Khan also criticized the Report saying, "No serious-minded person can even imagine the Muslims accepting such degrading proposals" In a similar view, Moulana Shaukat Ali said, "I had owned greyhounds since I was a young man, but I had never seen them deal with a hare as the Hindus proposed to deal with the Muslims" (Hussain, 2010).

With no new information from either side, the dispute continued. From this point on, the Congress solidified its position as a limited, segmented body incapable of presenting a cohesive front. It didn't matter that it kept making strong assertions about its national character (Hussain, 2010). The cleavage was irrevocable. Reviewing the Indian situation during 1926-31 in his book, Years of Destiny,

Mr. Goatman Hamid (1971), who had observed this development at close quarters, wrote: "There was unquestionably a new paradigm of Hindu-antagonism that emerged in organized political activity for political purposes starting in 1928. Compared to the old conventional, semi-instinctive animosity that expressed itself in street fights and stone-throwing on the days of religious festivals, it is something deeper, more enduring, and more inclusive in its goals. The state of Hindu-Muslim relations at the beginning of 1929 could cause India to collapse. The distance between them was so great that they would never be able to reunite, and it appeared as though a strong Muslim state could be established in the North and North-West with its back to India" (Hamid, 1971).

Congress created a rift between Hindu- Muslim unity by adopting this report, it was crystal clear that both would never return to same page. Congress also built a narrative that they would force British government to accept this report as it is. There was a little doubt that congress wanted to create a Hindu raj through their majority. At least this was an impression which left deep imprint on the minds of Muslims, they forgot the old days of Lucknow pact and Khilafat Movement. The unity of Congress and league was buried deep under the debris of communal riots (Aziz, 2013). Gandhi's emphasis on Hindu- Muslim unity sounded unreal in juxtaposition to his ultimatum to Britain that non- implementation of the report would lead to chaos. In 1928, the truth revealed on the Muslims that Congress is all but just a Hindu body. The Muslims would henceforth look upon it as the arch enemy of their claims and interests. In retrospect, it was clear

www.historymarg.com

that Muslim nationalism benefited from the Nehru Report indirectly. Nothing else at the moment could have brought the Muslims together as it did. Every personal rivalry and political difference were kept quiet. 'Indian nationalism' had no existence after this point. It took another ten years for a distinct Muslim national feeling to be given a name, but by then it had nearly reached maturity (Aziz, 2013).

4. Conclusion

The Nehru Report became a turning point in the history of Muslim nationalism in India. It led to a significant rift between Hindu and Muslim political aspirations. The report departed the ways of both political parties once and for all. This episode of Hindus selfishness revealed many hidden facts which were buried behind the minds of Hindus. Jinnah who was optimistic regarding this constitutional document when this report come into light it was full of Hindus biasedness. Once again, Hindus leader gave a great harm to Jinnah's trust. The All-India Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was dissatisfied with the report, primarily due to its rejection of separate electorates for Muslims. Jinnah countered with his famous Fourteen Points, which emphasized safeguards for the Muslim minority. The Nehru Report is often seen as a catalyst that widened the Hindu-Muslim divide, setting the stage for further communal tensions.

The report was criticized for failing to adequately address the concerns of the Muslim community. This failure is often cited as a missed opportunity for Hindu-Muslim unity. Despite its shortcomings, the Nehru Report remains a significant document in India's constitutional history. It was the first comprehensive attempt by Indians to outline a vision for their nation's future. The Nehru Report of 1928 was more than a constitutional proposal, it was a reflection of the aspirations and complexities of a nation in the throes of its freedom struggle. Its significance lies not only in its content but also in its impact on the trajectory of Indian nationalism, particularly the evolution of Muslim nationalism, from this point a major shift occurred into the political history of India. Muslims of India reached to conclusion that both communities could not live under the same flag. They should move towards separate region otherwise Hindus will snub their rights and this change of masters would be for Muslims under the leadership of Hindus. The Nehru report was constitutional document as well as it was a shift in the political struggle of Muslims. The castles of unity were withered away when report came to screen. It was shift in the political objectives for Muslims and it also set a track towards nationalism and later on, this culminated in the partition of India in 1947.

References

Aziz, K. K. (2013). *The Making of Pakistan: A Study in Nationalism*: Lahore: Sang – E- Meel Publications.

Bahadur, L., & Johari, J. (1988). Struggle for Pakistan: Tragedy of the Triumph of Muslim Communalism in India, 1906-1947.

Hamid, A. (1971). Muslim Separatism in India: A Brief Survey, 1858-1947.

Hussain, M. (2010). Muslim Nationalism in South Asia: Evolution through Constitutional Reforms. *J. Pol. Stud., 17*, 65.

Kazimi, M. R. (2009). *A Concise History of Pakistan*: Oxford University Press.

Khan, A. A., & Shamshad, M. (2022). Nehru Report: Triggering the Muslim Political Cohesion. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture, 43*(2).

Saeed, A., & Mansur, S. (2000). *Trek to Pakistan*: Lahore: Al Fouzi Publishers.

Wolpert, S. (1984). *Jinnah of Pakistan*: Oxford University Press New York.